SPECIAL ELECTION ISSUE

RRR

ROTHBARD–ROCKWELL REPORT

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# Hail to the Voters!

by Llewellyn H. Rockwell, Jr.

Why all the long faces? Despite first appearances, November's elections represented the greatest victory for liberty since 1994. It's also further evidence—even confirmation—that the anti-government revolution is unstoppable. What's more, the people have shown themselves to be more politically sound and principled than the opportunistic elites in the conservative movement. All this "Vital Center" talk is nothing but post-election jibberjabber. Radical libertarianism is here to stay.

Before demonstrating all this in detail, think about these facts to lift your spirits. Kemp's dead. Dole's dead. Ralph Reed is comatose. Good freshmen were reelected. Bad ones are back in private life. Above all—praise be to the voters of Texas's 14th district—Ron Paul is back in Congress! In fact, leave all else aside. Losing everything else would have been worth it to get the most radical and principled paleolibertarian in half a century back in Congress. Someone alert the D.C. Fire Department to put nets under the windows at the Fed.

I have private reasons for my joy. My beloved adopted state of Alabama, the birthplace of the chain gang, remains the freest in the nation. Voters, again, rejected pensions for state legislators. The question of auto inspections—we have none—didn't come up.

But my joy is also public spirited. In the election, voter turnout was the lowest since 1924, and the thinnest in 172 years. Ninety million people were registered to vote, but didn't show up. Contrary to the hand-wringing in the media, this is nothing to worry about. Effectively, these people voted for none of the above.

More good news: most people paid very little attention to the campaign. Only 24 percent of those questioned say they followed the election closely, compared with 42 percent in 1992. Three weeks before the election, 40 percent of voters couldn't name Bob Dole's running mate. Television ratings for the national conventions were at an all-time low. Seventy-three percent of voters say they found the campaign dull.

**Praise be to the voters of Texas's 14th district: Ron Paul is back in Congress!**

Sure, the motivations for not caring and not voting are mixed. With the two-income homes forced on us by decades of relentless Federal Reserve inflation, we are all busier than we used to be. To many, the federal government either doesn't matter or is a net drain on their lives. Others are getting what they want out of the system, and see no need to change it. But the generation that saw voting as a secular sacrament is dying off.

Whatever keeps people home instead of voting, it also represents the beginnings of the post-Cold War de-politicization and re-parochialization of society, and a praiseworthy re-emergence of private life. These are necessary first steps in returning to social normalcy, which also means less dependence on the federal apparatus of coercion and compulsion.

Refusing to vote is not allowed in every country. In some places, from Angola to Sweden, it's against the law. These governments like to rule under the pretense that they are giving the majority everything they ask for. If fewer than half of those registered to vote do so, as in the U.S., this claim becomes improbable.

Low voter turnout also prevents the people who hold power from believing that they have a "mandate," Washington's word for a license to step up government control. The political class is now free to believe that there's a silent majority out there, seething in anger that anyone at all was elected. That's a good thought for them to hold, if they contemplate raising our taxes again.

Yet, for many right-thinking people, the shock of a second Clinton

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presidency is proof that the people have either lost their minds or are morally corrupt. Let me attempt to capture their mood on election night, and, for that matter, in the preceding month.

How can a man of such little principle, and virtually no scruples, get reelected? By playing off the bankruptcy at the heart of the electorate, this theory goes. Like his hippie generation, the public now thinks it can have it all, and pay no price. We are slouching towards Gomorrah, in Robert Bork's phrase.

Before and since the election, I've heard this reasoning a hundred times. But I reject it. It's not only false, but it has the disastrous effect of causing people who should be active in political and intellectual life to despair, and choose to sit back and watch the collapse rather than fight it.

Yet two years ago, conservatives and libertarians were ebullient about the future of the country. Clinton's popularity was at its lowest point and anti-Clinton tracts were flying out of book stores. Health-care socialism had been rejected politically and in public opinion. What happened in 1994 was truly a revolution. It told us that the political instincts of the voters are by and large sound.

Could the culture have really collapsed, and the public sold its soul to the Devil, in the span of only two years? No, this is nonsense. Cultural decay is nothing new. To my mind, the culture's been falling apart, off and on, since the First World War. It is this period that marks the beginning of the real decline in education, music, clothing, popular tastes, religious doctrine, the family, and the rest of the leading cultural indicators.

My mother thought the culture had been rotten since women started smoking in public, while my father said it really began when men started cursing in front of women. Now women curse in front of men and *no one* is allowed to smoke in public. This is a lateral move at best. No, the culture hasn't collapsed in the last two years. In fact, there's plenty of reason to be optimistic, even on the cultural front, which is a future *RRR* article. Bork's book is some ten years behind the times.

**Directly related to the health of the culture is the size and intrusiveness of the central state.**

By the way, I've also heard many Republicans grousing about the fact that a majority of women voted for Clinton. These people are already rethinking the 19th amendment. What a surprise: women are by and large more liberal than men. That's always been true. A more interesting question is why—if Dole was a such a clear choice for all rational people—a majority of men voted against him.

A better way to account for the deep funk of our confreres is the status of the Republican Party. It didn't do well this year at the presidential level, and barely held on in the House: *ergo* the culture is rotten to the core. But this too is an absurd conclusion. The fate of the culture, or of freedom itself, is not the same thing as the fate of the Republican Party. To link them is to have an exaggerated focus on and hope for this political grouping. It certainly reflects a deep naivete about the true nature of the Republicans.

What is directly related to the health of the culture is the size and intrusiveness of the central state. The bigger the government gets, the more the welfare-warfare state grows, the more corrupt the people become. If the masses are demanding that the political system take ever more property for redistribution, we've got a problem. We've also got a problem when people overwhelming approve of the government that is destroying their livelihoods.

For example, it was truly frightening when Bush of Arabia received a 90 percent approval rating immediately following his tax-fueled desert excursion in Iraq. People who whoop it up for pointless wars are making slaves of themselves, and are offering themselves as tools in their own cultural corruption. Fortunately, this Cold War mentality seems to be on the decline.

It's also frightening to know that there have been times—as during the early New Deal—when the public hung on every word the president said, and trusted every move he made. Against all the warnings of the framers to never trust a man in power, these were a people sleep walking toward their own slaughter.

Today, people tell me that Clinton is bringing disgrace to the office of the presidency, causing people to lose faith in their governing institutions, increasing cynicism and

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disrespect toward our political leaders. I tell them to stop making such a powerful case for Clinton. After all, a famous conservative newspaper promised us that Dole would restore our faith in government. Ugh!

From the founding until 1860, the president was usually a non-entity so far as the life of the people was concerned, and Tocqueville correctly called this a sign of freedom. Today, the executive department is incomprehensibly big and imperious. To the extent that the presidency can be diminished, that's a great thing.

**Dole said his proudest achievements were WIC, Social Security tax increases, the ADA, food stamps, and farm subsidies.**

Exit polls this year reveal some interesting information. One vaguely worded question asked people whether they want the federal government to do more or less. Those were the only two options, and it didn't specify any more details. The result? Less beat more by a full 11 points. If this were an election, it would be a landslide for less government. As Ross Perot would say, can we agree this is a good sign?

But this is also where matters get complicated. Why, if most of the voting public told pollsters they wanted less government, did one third of those very same people vote for Bill Clinton? In a time when pollsters are lucky to find a few percent of people who say they trust the federal government, why is Bill Clinton president? You could chalk it up to Dole's weakness, but there's actually much more to it.

Clinton campaigned as the most conservative, and even anti-government, Democrat to appear on the national stage in generations. The defining exchange came in the first presidential debate, which attracted the highest number of viewers of any event in the campaign:

Clinton: "I wanted a government that was smaller and less bureaucratic.... We cut taxes for 15 million working Americans. Now, let's pass the tax cuts for education and child rearing..., medical emergencies and buying a home."

Clinton: "We have reduced the size of the federal government to its smallest size in 30 years. We've reduced more regulations, eliminated more programs than my two Republican predecessors."

Clinton: "Our government is smaller and less bureaucratic and has given more authority to the states than its two predecessors under Republican presidents."

Clinton: "It's inconvenient for Senator Dole, but the truth is I've reduced the size of government more than my Republican predecessors."

Incidentally, Dole never responded to these claims, most of which are crazy. By the second debate, Clinton was claiming to have reduced the government to its smallest size since the Civil War! Now, this is all worse than nonsense, but what matters here is perceptions. What matters are votes on the margin.

Here's the crucial point of this election: Clinton convinced one third of the 46 million voters who told pollsters they want less government that *he*, not Dole, was the one to give it to them. In contrast, Dole became more identified with Washington than the supposed outsider Clinton.

Look at Dole's rhetoric and it's not a surprise. In his Senate resignation speech, Dole said his proudest achievements were the WIC welfare program, the 1984 Social Security tax increases, the Americans With Disabilities Act, food stamps, and farm subsidies. And consider some of Dole's gems from the first debate:

Dole: "I've supported Medicare ever since [1965]. In fact, I used to go home, my mother would tell me, she said: 'Bob, all I've got is my Social Security and my Medicare. Don't cut it.' I wouldn't violate anything my mother said.... I've had the best health care in Government hospitals, Army hospitals, and I know its importance.... And I was proud to be on that [Social Security] commission, along with Claude Pepper, the champion of senior citizens from Florida."

That's *Red* Pepper, by the way, the man conservatives in the 1950s thought was a member of the Communist Party.

Dole: "I'm trying to save your Medicare, just as I rescued Social

Dean of the Austrian School of Economics, founder of modern libertarianism, and restorer of the Old Right, Murray N. Rothbard (1926–1995) was a one-man army of liberty. The *RRR* is inspired by his spirit, and dedicated to his vision.

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Security with a bipartisan commission. I have relatives on Medicare. I used to sign welfare checks for my grandparents. I know all about poverty and all about need and all about taking care of people. And that's been my career in the United States Senate."

Dole had a good job as county attorney. What does it tell us about the man that he allowed his grandparents to go on welfare?

Dole: "You know the first homeless bill in the Senate was the Dole-Byrd bill.... We can give you all these numbers. They don't mean a thing if you're out of work, you have nothing to eat or you can't have medical care or you're holding a crack baby in your arms right now, and what do you do next?"

Dole: "I've reached out to people all my life. I've worked on the food stamp program proudly and the WIC program and the school lunch program with senators like George McGovern, Hubert Humphrey, and others, to name a few of my Democratic friends. I'm not some extremist out here. I care about people." "So I don't want anybody out there to think that we've just been voting no, no, no."

The problem wasn't just the perception that Dole wouldn't keep his word. It was the threat that he *would* keep it on the spending side, but toss it out on the taxing side, just like his predecessor presidents from the Republican Party.

But when was the last time a candidate for president offered up a defense of the U.S. welfare state that covered all the major programs by name, with passion and an iron-clad promise to make them grow until the end of time? You would have to go back to FDR to find a parallel to what Dole told the public in this campaign.

And Dole did this in speech after speech, coast to coast. Even if his tax-cut proposal had been genuine, he undermined its credibility when he spent far more time talking about the spending he supports than the programs he's going to cut or abolish. In effect, Dole was telling the public, again and again, that he wasn't the principled statesman that the Democratic ads were claiming him to be. After all, this was the man who laughed, winked, and told a *New York Times* reporter, regarding his campaign rhetoric: "Don't believe everything I say." He ought to be glad that this remark was not reported until four days after the election.

**Gore touted tax cuts for the middle class and Kemp's heart bled for Michael Harrington's "Other America."**

And by the way, this season's political flapjack was on display in the vice presidential debates, where Gore touted tax cuts for the middle class and Kemp's heart bled for Michael Harrington's "Other America."

Now, we are all political mavens. We understand that there is a deep cynicism associated with these statements. We understand that it's polls, not principle, talking here. But look at it from the average person's point of view. Clinton and Gore were never refuted in their claims to be the real conservatives, while Dole and Kemp shored up their already extensive big-government credentials.

It appeared to many voters that the man who said "the era of big government is over" might really mean it. He followed through with that language during the campaign. He followed through with his actions, in signing a welfare bill that Republicans said abolished entitlements. He stopped Haitian and most Cuban immigration, ended Nixon's 55 mile-an-hour speed limit, signed a bill barring national protection of gay marriage, and barred immigrants with AIDS. He also zeroed out funding for new federal housing subsidies. All this means that we are ever-so-slightly freer today than we were the day before yesterday.

Moreover, from the average person's point of view, Clinton appeared less pro-Washington, less pro-government, less pro-welfare state, and, even, less pro-taxes than Dole. He came across as more pro-middle class, more in favor of cutting particular taxes and spending programs. He also seem less interested in war and less devoted to dumping more money on the military. In a myriad of areas, in short, Clinton campaigned more like a responsible conservative, while Dole and Kemp might as well have been reading press releases from the AARP and the NAACP.

Late in the campaign, economist Richard MacKenzie took a look at the actual data as compared to the rhetoric. In a fascinating article, MacKenzie showed that, in real terms, federal spending has gone up 1 percent a year under Clinton. That's way too much. But look back at the 1980s. Real federal spending went up 3 percent a year under Reagan. And under Clinton, federal spending as a percentage of GDP has fallen to 21 from an average of 23 percent in Reagan's first term.

More facts from Professor MacKenzie: the number of federal workers zoomed 8 percent under Reagan, but fell 5 percent under Clinton. Now, you might say that it's the Republican Congress that should take credit. That would be wrong. Three quarters of the decline took place before the Republican Congress gained control, which then criticized Clinton for cutting civilian Pentagon employment, and for not spending enough on the military.



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Of course, some of these data are fudged. In particular, the employment data don't include work that is contracted out, and 22 million people work for businesses or non-profits that do government work. Also, spending as a percent of GDP is the worst way to measure government's size.

Yet there is something refreshing even in Clinton's lies. Republicans, in an attempt to deflect criticism that they hate government, have been bragging for a decade on how much they *increase* government. Dole is squarely in the Reagan tradition in this regard. Clinton has made it possible to win by claiming a record of slashing the size and scope of federal government. Someday, even Republicans may do the same.

My point is this: gaining the presidency was a testament to Clinton's political ability, and at the same time a slap in the face to the on-again-off-again statism of the Republican ticket. Clinton's victory, in other words, provides no justification for hanging our heads and complaining about the state of the culture or the poor judgment of the people.

Indeed, in this election, virtually no candidate campaigned on a promise of across-the-board bigger government. Quite the opposite. The modal platform this year was balanced budgets, targeted tax breaks, crime control, and family values—a vague Eisenhower conservatism minus the militarism. It could be worse, and has been.

Is the age of big government really over? No, but the age of ever-bigger government may be about to come to an end. We are seeing the collapse of the central planning ideology right here at home. The left is on the run, the power elite is scared, and the friends of liberty have every reason to celebrate.

Let's consider some of the issues in this election. Based on the returns and on the issues that were debated, I've got six winners and six losers. In accord with late-night fashion, I'll begin with the number six.

## Loser Number Six: The Politcs of Victimhood

Preeminent in this regard is California's Proposition 209, which bans race and sex preferences in public hiring, public university admissions, and public contracts. The initiative was, of course, imperfect. Even so, the proponents of quotas fought hard against it. Their ads linked Prop. 209 with the KKK and Nazism. But it all backfired, for the average voter could not see what was wrong with banning special legal privileges for selected classes of citizens.

**We are seeing the collapse of the central planning ideology right here at home.**

Even the Democratic Party refrained from defending affirmative action this season, with Clinton and Gore both uttering the incoherent phrase that it must be mended not ended. Even more encouraging, we are starting to see mainstream writers taking another look at the idea of anti-discrimination law itself, the real legal source of social conflict.

A growing movement is demanding a return to what Michael Oakeshott said are the foundational principles of civil society: the freedom to contract, based on private ownership and control of property, and the freedom of association. Lack of these freedoms equals slavery, he said, and anti-discrimination law seeks to abolish both. By the way, more than half the delegates to the Republican convention agreed with this position.

Yet the Republicans missed the boat on this issue too. They put Colin Powell on national television to praise affirmative action to pro-forma applause. And they nominated as vice president a man who has long backed affirmative action. Even the standard-bearer of the party gave a speech in California that argued that the key problem with quotas is that they "leave the poor behind." Is justice no longer an issue?

Indeed, Dole's speech on the issue—the only one he gave—was rotten, sell-outy, incoherent, compromising, shifty, smarmy, and gaseous. That is to say, he echoed the words of Clint Bolick and the other neocons. He said we need to abolish race quotas, and replace them with need-based quotas. He said we need to get rid of race-based affirmative action, while promising stronger enforcement of anti-discrimination law.

Think about the Texaco fiasco, where the racial looting is wild, destructive, and sickening. The episode has nothing to do with explicit race quotas or affirmative action; it was caused by anti-discrimination law that puts the government in charge of the labor market and allows it to exercise arbitrary and capricious power. For not telling the truth about this, Dole's speech on race privilege deserved to be ignored. It certainly wasn't any better, but only longer, than Clinton's rhyming quip.

Racial victimology wasn't the only loser in this category. The Republican nominee openly campaigned as



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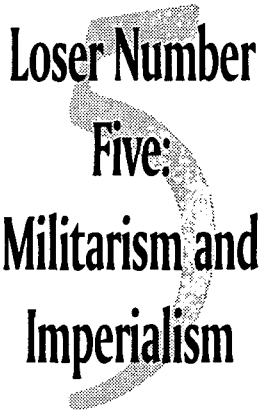
a member of an official victim group himself. In nearly every public appearance, Dole talked about how much his disability had been a disadvantage to him, how he had fought all his life for disability rights and disability welfare, and he even bragged that he had the so-called disability vote sewn up. I'm not sure how this is different from a man who says he should get the black vote because he's black. It's just as off-putting.

Interestingly, real victims' rights initiatives passed in the eight states where they appeared on the ballot. Several require authorities to inform victims when criminals are arrested, convicted, sentenced, imprisoned, released, or scheduled for court appearance.




Since the end of the Cold War, the governing class hasn't stopped blabbing about our responsibilities to the globe. We are the world's only super power, they say. Therefore, it is our responsibility to save mankind from various and nefarious named and unnamed threats that loom in this ever-more dangerous world. Military government must remain big and ever growing, to meet our responsibilities.

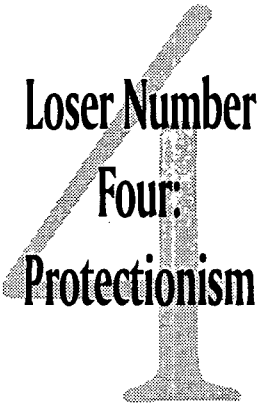
Yet, this year, the public couldn't give a flip about the high-flown justifications for the waste and global bullying of the military-industrial complex. The question hardly came up. If the first debate hadn't been monopolized by Jim Lehrer, foreign policy might not have been mentioned at all. During the citizen round-table debate, a lady who claimed to have a foreign policy question turned out to be asking about trade.

**We should close military bases around the country that have long subsidized drunkenness, drug use, tattooing, sexual profiteering, and moral seediness.**

The Republican ticket attempted to make Clinton's foreign policy an issue, claiming it was incoherent. But if you are making that claim, don't you have to offer a more-coherent alternative? Dole complained that Clinton consulted overseas allies both too much and too little, while the vice presidential pick uttered one of the few memorable phrases of the campaign about Clinton's bombing of Iraq. Kemp said: "Don't Bomb Before Breakfast." I agree, but I don't see how that squares with a military program that was otherwise more hawkish than the Democrats'.

The public's sound instincts do not result from a perverse isolationism. It is simply a matter of policy consistency. If we want to cut the welfare state, we've got to cut the warfare state. If we want smaller government at home, we can't keep funding ever-bigger government abroad. Leviathan feeds especially on war and imperialism. We need to mind our own business—just as the voters seem to be demanding.

For my part, I'd like to see more candidates running on an explicitly pro-peace platform, calling for the troops to come home, for anti-civilian nuclear weapons to be dismantled, and for the closing of military bases around the country that have long subsidized every manner of drunkenness, drug use, tattooing, sexual profiteering, and moral seediness in our communities. But until that wonderful day, I'm happy to witness the public's growing noninterest in foreign affairs, and to watch the national attention turn towards what it ought to be focused on: our own troubles here at home.




Think back three years ago, to the trade debate. Despite tremendous unpopularity, Nafta was passed by Congress and then signed by the president. Then Gatt was passed in a lame-duck session of Congress, again over the objections of most of the public. The peso collapsed the following January, exposing Mexico's inflation-pumped economy as an illusion and triggering a bailout mechanism insinuated into Nafta at the last minute.

These mercantilist and interventionist trade deals, billed as free trade, led to one of the great trade train wrecks in history. Indeed, they threaten to permanently discredit the free-trade ideal. In the primary season, at least one Republican candidate tried to win the nomination with the most openly protectionist rhetoric used by any major-party political figure in a generation.



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It scared the heck out of me. In an economy that is increasingly international, I can't imagine any better way to trigger a new depression than by erecting trade barriers or fomenting trade wars with partners like Japan, Taiwan, Singapore, and China. Fortunately for the people and the economy, passions cooled, and the issue was largely dropped this season.

I want to see the managed trade of Nafta and Gatt repealed, and genuine free trade instituted, with no barriers to imports or exports whatsoever. Absent that, it is a victory for liberty that the protectionist agenda received no reinforcement in this campaign. Moreover, there are no signs of it being revived anytime soon.

## Loser Number Three: The Federal Drug War

Try as he might, Dole was never able to make an issue out of drugs, or gain favor with the voters by promising a stepped-up and militarized drug war. This was not because people are becoming culturally left-wing; it's because they're becoming more wise to the ways of the political class. They're fed up with Washington's wars, and persuaded that drugs are more of a moral and medical matter.

The government certainly hasn't solved the drug-addict problem, or even made a dent in it. At the same time, the decades-old drug war has diminished our liberty, corrupted cops and courts, pushed real criminals out of jail, robbed us of financial privacy, and made us less secure in our property. Not for a minute do I believe that the federal government cares whether we are drug free or not; after all, they don't shrink from exposing U.S. troops to poisons far more damaging than pot, and then lying about it. What the drug war is about is power and control.

Up till now, it's worked well. But today, people understand better than ever that the drug-addict problem can only be addressed at the local level, in schools, churches, and communities. It was a great relief that Dole was not able to pull another Reagan, and use the issue of drugs to whip up the public in favor of more centralized statism.

Yet, this year the voters did even better. A California ballot initiative legalized the cultivation, possession, and use of marijuana for health reasons. Similarly, Arizona agreed to allow doctors to prescribe marijuana and heroin for sick people, and mandated treatment rather than jail for non-violent offenders. It would be difficult to underestimate the significance of these measures. They break a taboo, and represent a modicum of good sense being applied to the issue. Just as encouraging, they also represent attempted state nullification of federal law.

**California and Arizona attempted state nullification of federal law.**

To highlight the decline of the drug issue, let me again cite Ron Paul. During his election battle this year, against a trial lawyer named, of all things, "Lefty," the issue of drugs came up. Ron favors a federalist approach, seeing no constitutional mandate for the central government to run a $30 billion drug war. Lefty accused Ron of wanting pure legalization, and he ran ads on the subject day in and out, for months. Yet in this conservative, rural Texas district, it had no impact. Ron won a solid victory.

## Loser Number Two: Environmentalism

Both environmentalism and socialism put the government in charge of the economy, but they differ in one important respect: socialism promises prosperity for all, whereas environmentalism promises to make us all poorer, for the benefit of bugs and weeds. Try as they might environmentalists are having a more difficult time selling the idea.

I've felt for some time that environmentalism has peaked. For example, the recycling craze of a few years back is being discredited, having near-bankrupted many cities and towns.

Most new environmental regulations have had to be imposed by executive fiat, over the heads of both the voters and the Congress. I am thinking of Clinton's unconscionable nationalization of parts of Utah before the election.

There were devastating defeats for environmentalism. In Florida, a ballot initiative would have imposed a new sugar tax to, as the proponents said, clean up the Everglades. But it wasn't until the crash of the Value Jet that most people discovered how repulsive this giant patch of disease-ridden muck really is.

The purpose of the proposed tax was to re-swamp some areas that had been heroically drained for agriculture. But fortunately, although environmentalists poured vast resources

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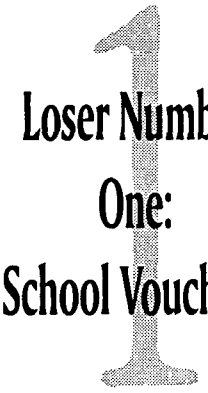
into the effort, the tax went down to a solid defeat. Too bad: the swamp will just have to fend for itself.

And in Maine, an initiative to ban logging and clear-cutting on 10 million acres of highly productive land was defeated. It was a particularly clear example of human prosperity vs. the supposed rights of trees, and it could have destroyed the economy of the state, as the governor pointed out. But it too failed, and soundly.




Now some good people favor this idea. And I'm willing to believe that this results from intellectual confusion, not the desire to launch a new and ever-expanding federal welfare program, to destroy private schools, to further nationalize education, to confiscate and redistribute tens of billions of dollars, and to gut what remains of religious content in parochial schools and turn them into copies of the public ones. Yet that is exactly what would result if this highly dangerous proposal were put into effect.

Suffice it to say that Bob Dole was tricked on this issue. Early on, he decided to make it a centerpiece of his campaign, but gradually dropped it as it became clear that it didn't interest either grass-roots Republicans or average voters. Dole had been told that federal vouchers would endear him to conservatives. He went along because he is not exactly adverse to new federal spending programs. Perhaps he saw it as the educational equivalent of the food stamp program he had long championed in the Senate: choice in dining.

What he did not know is that federal vouchers would not endear him to authentic conservatives. After all, conservatives are against tax-paid subsidies to private industry; vouchers are a tax-paid subsidy to the private-school industry.

**The people will not agree to being taxed yet again to pay for the underclass to attend private schools most of the middle class can't afford.**

Conservatives are against federal aid to education, and have fought it from at least the turn of the century; vouchers are nothing if not federal education aid.

Conservatives are against federal intrusion in school autonomy; yet federal vouchers guarantee federal control over admission, curriculum, promotion, and discipline.

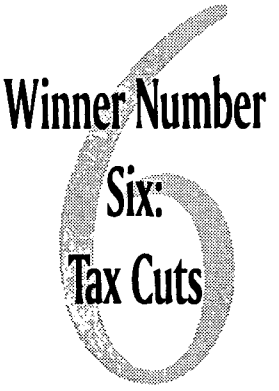
Conservatives are against taking from the rich to give to the poor; yet as the rhetoric of voucher advocates has progressively descended into the leftist gutter, that is precisely the language they have began to use.

What an incredible strategic error Dole committed. He allowed himself to be positioned solidly to the left of the Democrats on education. In the first debate, Dole's rhetoric about the right of the poor to a private education, paid for by the rich and run by the federal government, caused Clinton to make the following comments: "If we're going to have a private voucher plan, that ought to be done at the local level or the state level.... It's amazing to me—you are all for having more responsibility at the local level for everything, except schools." Dole never responded.

It is hardly surprising that yet another voucher initiative went down to defeat, in Washington state, and it was beaten as badly as the California voucher initiative of 1992. Far from being a victory for the teachers union, this is further evidence of the continuing anti-government revolt. People already pay too much for public school; they will not agree—and should not agree—to being taxed yet again to pay for the underclass to attend private schools most of the middle class can't afford. The entire idea is preposterous.

There are also problems with privately funded voucher programs. You get the sense that they are political stalking horses for eventual tax-paid programs. And they are also based on the socialist notion that everyone should have equal access to the highest-quality education. It's not going to happen, and should not happen, in education, any more than in cars, homes, clothes, or food. Educational services ought to be allocated by the market and by merit, not though egalitarian wealth redistribution.

So much for the losers in this election. Now to the winners.




The tax revolt received a huge boost, with tax measures failing just about everywhere they were tried. And in Illinois, 18 of 19 counties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voted to limit property taxes. In Prince George's County, Maryland, voters put a lid on taxes. Florida imposed a requirement for a two-thirds vote of the people before any tax or fee is ever raised again.

And look at California's Prop. 218, the Right to Vote on Taxes Act. It was backed by the organization founded by the late Howard Jarvis, the man behind Prop. 13 of 1978. If that was the mother of all tax-revolt referenda, this is an impressive offspring.

Prop. 218 goes after virtually all levies, including taxes on hotel occupancy and business licenses, as well as fees for street sweeping and public landscaping. "It doesn't handcuff us," a panicked lobbyist for the California State Association of Counties told the *Los Angeles Times*. "It encases us in a block of cement and throws us in the lake!"

The act ensures that no local tax can be imposed or raised without a majority vote of property holders. Even some existing taxes will have to be submitted to a new vote. It will close a loophole in the law that emerged in the years following Prop. 13. Claiming to be strapped for cash, and unable to raise it through property taxes, local governments turned to a deceptive trick called "assessment districts."

California taxpayers—who thought they had already tied the hands of legislators—discovered that they didn't have a way to stop these districts. Prop. 218 does just that, and it passed overwhelmingly.

Also impressive: the voting will be weighted according to how much property a person owns and therefore how much he would be affected by the new assessment. For example, if one landowner would pay twice as much as another, his vote counts twice as much. Those who have the greatest stake in sound policy have the most influence.

But doesn't Dole's failure bode ill for the tax revolt? Not at all. From the beginning, the problem with Dole's tax cut scheme was not that his numbers didn't add up. It was that he was not believable. Only 17 percent thought the tax cut would actually be enacted if he were elected. At his first debate, Dole even lent credibility to this by pointing out that his tax cut was not 15 percent right away. It would be phased in over 3, 6, or 7 years, depending on the campaign spokesman.

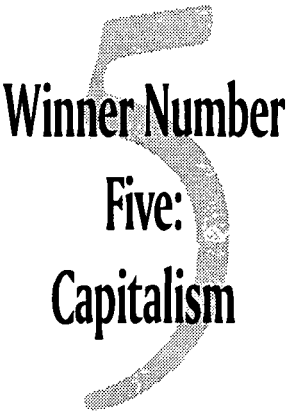
But political history shows that a politician will tend to throw out his promises after the first year. After that, and indeed often after the first 100 days, all bets are off.

**But doesn't Bob Dole's failure bode ill for the tax revolt?**

Dole often denounced Clinton for shamelessly appropriating conservative phrases and goals. But shouldn't Dole be denounced as shameless appropriating the language of tax cuts after having defended every aspect of the Leviathan state his entire life? Bob Dole and tax cuts go together like Lincoln and states rights, or Mao and civil liberties.

Gore was right when he said in the vice presidential debate that "Bob Dole never met a tax that he didn't hike." But the deadliest moment was when Gore, after hearing Kemp praise John F. Kennedy's famous tax cut for the second time, pointed out that Dole had voted against it.

Finally, Clinton's tax cuts did seem believable to many. I hope the new Republican Congress holds him to his word, and passes every one he promised during the campaign.




The headline in the *New York Times* said it all: "Business Was a Big Winner, Too." Of course, the liberal reporter was not happy about it.

In California, anti-capitalists sponsored a horrible initiative that would have made it easy to sue companies if their stock price went down. This would have been deadly for the state's economy. But it was soundly defeated, with 74 percent of voters against it. Voters also turned down an envious proposal to restore the two highest brackets in the state income tax, a proposition aimed openly at successful businessmen.

In addition, higher minimum wages were rejected in Denver, Missouri, and Montana. And on the health care front, California voters rejected an initiative that would have interfered in the internal policies of HMOs. This is a sign that voters are less socialistic on health care than Congress, which recently passed some appalling regulations on hospitals stays for new mothers, and abolished the freedom of insurers not to cover mental health as fully as physical health.

Even more importantly, the moral and practical legitimacy of capitalism was not an issue in this election. This may not seem like much, but remember the primary season. The entry of Steve Forbes into the race triggered a tidal wave of anti-capitalist hysteria. This was at the height of the left-wing attack on corporations for layoffs and for opening factories outside U.S. borders.



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One contender decided to make an issue of this, and began a relentless attack on so-called corporate butchers. *Newsweek* followed up with a socialist cover story on the same subject, labeling as public enemies such innocents as the head of Scott Paper Towels.

The episode frightened the daylights out of me. Capitalism and capital accumulation are fragile things. If a major politician is able to whip up the masses against wealth as such, and call for the virtual extermination of those who create jobs and invest resources wisely, we could be doomed as an economy and a society. It was a relief when the rhetoric ended, and the attacks on capitalism came to a halt.

Another important sign of capitalism's triumph in this election was the defeat of organized labor. The AFL-CIO had based its revival on a $35 million spending blitz—and perhaps as much as $100 million—to reassert its political power. The effort bombed. The Democrats not only lost most of the races targeted by unions, union support actually backfired for many candidates.

Here's a prediction you can put money on: the Democrats will start backing away from the political agenda of organized labor, just as they have with many of the other voting blocs they have relied on in the past.

Moreover, the existence of the rich, and the unequal distribution of wealth across class lines, never became an issue. Indeed, the only candidate who talked of the inherent unfairness of a society of haves and have-nots was Jack Kemp. The *New York Times* commented that "all this suggests that Americans' on-again, off-again flirtation with anti-business causes is off again." I say we need to work to keep it that way.

## Winner Number Four: Regionalism

This country is too big to be governed from one location. To attempt it is an experiment in central planning not different in kind from the Soviets'. Fortunately, we are stronger in our autonomous regional cultures and love of states rights than the media and the government want us to be. Look at the regionalized map displayed on the night of the election.

And if you followed Clinton around the country, you saw that he went to great lengths to acknowledge distinctive regional cultures, ethnicity, cuisine, weather, habits, manners, interests, and folkways. He told anecdotes that caused his listeners to believe he understood their right to their own regional and state culture. It was highly successful politically, of course, but it speaks to a deeper truth.

There is no such thing as a homogeneous blob called the American people or American culture, no matter how casually we throw around these phrases. Our culture is regional, and implacably so. The South will never be like the North, nor the West like the East, nor the Midwest like New England, despite 100 years of predictions that we are merging into one indistinguishable lump.

In fact, to be successful in the future, a political program must recognize and support peculiar characteristics of regionalism, states rights, and localism.

During the Cold War, when the national culture was organized around certain collectivist principles and regionalism was considered a danger to national unity, many of these secessionistic attitudes were suppressed. But a return to normalcy has led to a reassertion of particularism and parochialism, the cultural preconditions for a realized liberty.

This is why conservatives and libertarians must never advocate any solution to social problems, no matter how grave, that requires national intervention against local rights. That goes for gambling, abortion, and many other issues as well. The only obligation of the federal government is to get out of the way, and let lower levels of society manage their own affairs, consistent with subsidiarity and federalism.

## Winner Number Three: Radicalism

The media tell us that now the people want moderation, a government of the Vital Center. There's no persuasive evidence for this. House members from 1994 like Helen Chenowyth and Mark Neumann won tight races based on their political radicalism.

Again, let me raise the Ron Paul example. His opponent called him a cruel and wacky anarchist who wanted no government at all. Ron's response was to calmly point out that this was a bunch of nonsense; for starters, he only wanted to cut the government to about one-tenth its present size. Voters loved it.



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On the other hand, radicalism without credibility is pointless. For example, I doubt a more extreme tax proposal by Dole would have helped him, because his problem was that he, more than any high-ranking politician, represents the established order. Another prediction: Look for the nonsense about the Vital Center to disappear in no less than 30 days.

## Winner Number Two: Family and Faith

Religion received no serious pounding this year from any of the winners. And much to the consternation of secularist elites, most political winners talked openly of their love of faith and family. Clinton—one of the most openly religious presidents in our history—never missed the opportunity to quote Holy Scripture. He even told the National Baptist Convention that he wants to establish the kingdom of God on earth, an alarming promise.

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The Christian Coalition received criticism for its voter cards, but even the media are now largely reconciled to the place of faith in our lives. And, by the way, it would be wrong to use membership in that organization—or any other politically active religious organization—as a barometer of religious faith. Faith doesn't have to be politicized to be real.

Many commentators suggest we are living through another great revival, and that's true. And because people are turning back to traditional faith, they are also transferring their loyalties from the government to their communities and families. This is no time for a politician to be seen as opposing the religious views of the vast Christian majority.

All this bodes well for the future of liberty, of which religious faith is an essential foundation. A people who puts its faith in God will not likely put its faith in statism. A people whose moral standards are drawn from transcendent norms are less likely to accept the false norms of the secularist power elite.

Although Colorado defeated a left-atheist proposal to tax churches, it also gave me one of my few disappointments this election: the failure of the parental rights initiative. This is the one that reaffirmed that parents have the inalienable right "to direct and control the upbringing, education, values, and discipline of their children."

This initiative might have brought into question the existence of compulsory school attendance laws, laws which effectively prevent a competitive market for educational services from developing. And it would have helped keep the coercive class of meddling social workers from telling us how to raise our children.

But it was defeated by an effective campaign alleging that it would have allowed child abuse. That was absurd, but it worked well enough to cost us a victory. On the other hand, let's remember that this was the first time such a far-reaching initiative had come to a vote in any state. It would have repealed about 100 years of legal tradition. That would have been grand, but there is no reason to be down in the mouth because it failed the first time.

## Winner Number One: Liberty Itself

This election reinforced the theme of our time. We are seeing the systematic discrediting of the central social reality of the century: the omnipotent state.

It is for this reason that I am extremely optimistic about the prospects for our movement, by which I mean not a particular political party, but the intellectual crusade against all forms of statism, and for extreme political decentralism and consistent economic libertarianism.

For most of the century, our intellectual compatriots have struggled to restore the classical liberal world of the previous century, when government tended to uphold the rule of law, free trade reigned, liberty and property were almost sacred, and the prospects for civilization seemed unlimited. World wars intervened, and we've been fighting ever since to recover the world the wars stole from us.

But today, the welfare state is overextended. It faces certain financial bankruptcy in the first decade of the next century. The people can no longer be taxed at increasing levels. The looted are turning on



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the looters. The elites know it, and are terrified. The limits of big government have nearly been reached.

There was another factor too. The federal government is no longer the center of national attention. The presidential campaign this year had a hard time making the local news, even when the candidates were in the area. With the end of the Cold War, the feds are simply dropping off the cultural and social map.

The exciting truth about this election and our times generally is this: our efforts and those of our ideological forefathers—beginning with the Old Right's struggle against the New Deal and war—are bearing fruit. The ideas of liberty are beginning to produce real-world consequences. If we keep up the fight, we will see the restoration of an authentic liberty in our time.

Such social changes can take many years, or they can happen very quickly, as the events of the last few years have shown. Ten years ago, who would have thought that the Soviet Union wouldn't exist, that Eastern Europe would not be communist, that foreign policy would not be an issue, that secessionism would be a common theme in American politics.

The pace of cultural and political change—the good kind!—is on fast-forward. Take the new book on *The Rules* that attempts to teach young women about men, and how to get married. It's a gigantic best-seller: bookstores and wholesalers can't keep it in stock. This one book, imperfect as it is, is by itself capable of overturning thirty years of feminist brainwashing.

Such good news doesn't mean that we can relax and hope the state will wither away, as if it were the logic of history. Quite the contrary, we must keep up the fight, and step it up. It is up to us to keep our focus on the goal, to be alert to the tricks of the power elite, to forge ahead regardless of party and only according to principle, and to fight all our lives for the cause of liberty, as Murray Rothbard did.

As he did, we must ask the question—with eyes open, hearts longing for freedom, and minds centered on strategy—what can we do to further the cause. The first task is always intellectual. The idea of statism must be discredited in academic and public affairs, and the ideas of liberty advanced. Political victories are an after-effect of this core intellectual work.

What's at stake? The ongoing battle between individualism and collectivism, capitalism and socialism, war and peace, family and the secular elite, the community and the ant heap. Surely this struggle is worth every ounce of our commitment and energy. If we do our jobs properly, liberty can be not only our heritage, but our destiny.

This speech was delivered on November 12, 1996, at the famed Wisconsin Forum in Milwaukee.

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